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Boston Public Library

Pointers for Parents

Children and the Internet

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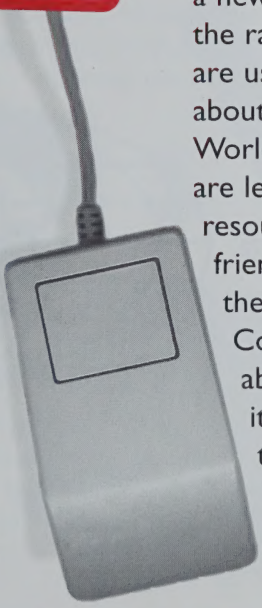


"Surfing the Net" "Connecting to the Web" "Checking out a site" and "Talking on Chat Lines" may be terms that you have heard recently while watching television, reading a newspaper, or listening to the radio. These phrases are used when talking about the Internet and the World Wide Web. Children are learning about these resources from their friends, in school, and at the public library. Conflicting reports about the Internet and its resources have led to confusion and fear. The Internet is also exciting and has unlimited possibilities.

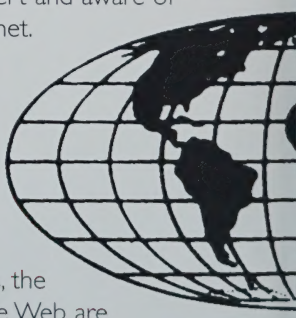
What Parents Should Know

The Internet is a global network of information accessible with a computer. Not only is the information presented with words, but it also may be accompanied by pictures, sound, and short video clips. There are literally thousands of "sites" with educational and recreational information. These sites are "linked" with other related sites to create a "web" (like a spider web) of topics that provide all kinds of information known as the World Wide Web. Almost anything you want to know about can be found somewhere on the Internet. People are free to put any information on the Internet without identifying themselves.

Also on the Internet are "chat rooms" or "talk lines" that allow people to have "computer conversations" on a variety of topics. People write messages which are sent and displayed on the computer screen. Anyone can participate in the discussions that range from football to the latest archaeological find in Egypt.

The Internet and the World Wide Web are not regulated and that opens the door to some risks. Some information may not be accurate or appropriate for children and teenagers. And, because the computer allows for anonymity, websites may be rude, obnoxious and even sexually explict and/or exploitative.

Does this mean that you shouldn't allow your child to use the Internet? Of course not, it simply means that you should be alert and aware of the information on the Internet.



Boston Public Library

Computers in public libraries, the Internet, and the World Wide Web are here to stay. The Boston Public Library provides these resources, free of charge. We consider it our responsibility to be a leader in providing information, though we are aware that some of the information provided may be considered inappropriate for children.

The Boston Public Library offers Internet access, free of charge, to any valid library card holder, regardless of age, who uses our facilities. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult.

The Central Library and Branch Libraries have computers in public areas for you or your child to use to look at websites of your choice.

This means your child may select or be exposed to information, words, and pictures that you would rather he or she not see.

The Boston Public Library encourages parents to guide their children's Internet experiences, in the same manner as they guide children's television viewing and reading material.

We want you to have a positive experience in our libraries. One way to ensure this is to accompany your child to the library. If you can not always be with your child, you should be aware that our staff cannot control or censor any patron's Internet sessions. This does not mean that we don't want your child to visit the library. We can help your child find information, and our computers access not only the Internet but also the On-Line Public Access Catalog. As a parent you need to be made aware of the possibility that your child may select, view, or read materials that you could find offensive.

The Boston Public Library's World Wide Web site includes a Kids' Page" and a "Teen Lounge" to guide children and parents to appropriate educational and recreational sites.

As a parent, you can use these "pages" to guide your child's Internet sessions. Every effort is made to insure that the selected sites are age and interest appropriate.

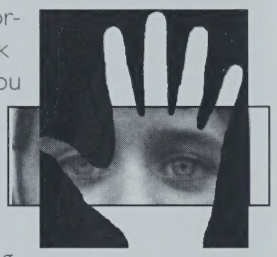
The Boston Public Library provides computers with filtering software to limit children's exposure to some websites. The software blocks specific sites that could be offensive to some users. Please be aware however, that filtering software is not available on all computers - only on machines designated for children's use. Filtering software may not block all material you might find offensive.

The Boston Public Library believes in open access to information and is dedicated to providing education, information, recreation, and inspiration in the communities it serves.

The Internet resources available help us to help you find the information you want and need. Because the Internet is not regulated or monitored, we are placed in an awkward position. We continue to rely on you as a parent to ensure that your child has a positive, beneficial, and fun experience at the library.

Guidelines for Parents

The best way to ensure that your child has a positive experience is to be aware of the kinds of information found on the Internet and to stay in touch with what your children are doing. It is important that you, as a parent, assume responsibility for your child's computer use at home, at school, or at the public library.



Explore the wide range of information that is available and talk with your child about topics you consider off-limits.

If you or your child becomes aware of the transmission of child pornography, report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678.

Stress to your child that he or she should not give out identifying information such as name, home address, school name or telephone number.

Set your rules for your child's Internet use.

What Parents Can Do

- Talk to your child about the Internet
- Set Internet rules together
- Keep aware of computer services offered by the library
- Visit the library with your child
- Take advantage of Internet training opportunities available at the library

"Surfing the Net" can be an exciting family experience. The opportunities to expand one's horizons are great. Make the most of them by sharing the experience with your child.

If you need assistance, ask the librarian. Staff are available to help you.

Visit our Kids' Page and Teen Lounge at *www.bpl.org*

The text of this brochure was adapted with permission from The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. 4/97